



The Florida House of Representatives

Chris Sprowls
Speaker

NEWS RELEASE

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Speaker Sprowls: Florida Slams Door on Foreign Espionage

"Bold counter-espionage agenda a continuation of the House investigation into Chinese corruption efforts in the state"

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (June 7, 2021) — Today, Florida House Speaker Chris Sprowls, R-Palm Harbor, called Governor DeSantis' signing of first-in-the-nation legislation against foreign espionage a "warning" to any country who would steal secrets from Florida's companies and colleges or try to control local decisions.

"Today, we expose and stop foreign adversaries and their agents from walking through the front doors of our corporations and universities and sneaking out the back with our taxpayer-funded research," said House Speaker Sprowls. "China's spies can leave empty-handed," referring to China's Thousand Talents state-sponsored program to embed their "researchers" to spy on American research facilities. "These bills are the boldest state anti-espionage bills in the country."

Representative Erin Grall, R-Vero Beach, Chair of the Public Integrity & Elections Committee and sponsor of House Bill 7017 said, "Florida's new disclosure laws will help colleges and universities ferret out foreign agents who steal research secrets that took years and millions of taxpayer dollars to produce. These bad actors will be held accountable, and Florida's academic institutions will be better for it."

The legislation requires institutions of higher education to disclose foreign gifts above \$50,000, more fully screen foreign applicants for research positions and monitor and report on employment-based foreign travel. Furthermore, the legislation prohibits certain agreements with China, Cuba, Iran, North Korea, Russia, Syria and Venezuela that are detrimental to the security of the United States or allow for foreign control of decisions. The legislation is a result of the work of the Sprowls-led Select Committee on the Integrity of Research Institutions, of which Chair Grall was a member.

The Governor today also signed House Bill 1523, sponsored by Representative Mike Beltran, R-Valrico to increase penalties for intellectual property theft that benefits a foreign nation or agent and creates a trafficking in trade secrets crime for any person who traffics or attempts to traffic in trade secrets they know or should have known was stolen.

“Prosecutors and research institutions will have the weapons to fight back against foreign corporate and espionage. Once again, Florida leads the nation with the strength of the penalties provided in this bill,” said Representative Beltran.

Both bills passed the House and Senate unanimously

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